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LEE HARVEY OSWALD IN KENNEDY DEATH

NOT ALONE -- WECHT

You'd think that people would listen to a man like Cyril Wecht.

He's a forensic pathologist, a person with degrees in both law and medicine. He's Research Professor of Law and Director, Institute of Forensic Sciences, at Duquesne University; and a Clinical Assistant Professor of Pathology at Pitt Medical School. He's also a recent past president of both the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and of the American College of Legal Medicine. Besides all of which, he's the Coroner of Allegheny County.

But when he begins to talk about the discrepancies in the Warren Commission Report on the assassination of President John Kennedy, silence is both the official and consistent response.

This August, Wecht became the second non-

government medical expert allowed to view the items from the autopsy of President Kennedy stored at the National Archives in Washington.

In an interview with the Fair Witness, Wecht said he questioned the Commission's findings even before his two days of research at the National Archives, but when he came out his conclusion was that "the Warren Commission Report is totally untenable, unacceptable, and absolutely incorrect as far as its findings on Lee Harvey Oswald and the single assassin theory."

The Kennedy family turned over numerous items from the autopsy to the Archives in October, 1966, with the stipulations that none of the material be released to the public during the lifetime of Kennedy family members, and that after five years "recognized experts in pathology or related sciences" would be allowed to view them.

The first expert granted permission to view the items was Dr. John Lattimer of New York. Lattimer is a urologist—a kidney and bladder specialist—whose main qualification seems to be that he has been a consistent defender of the Commission's findings. Lattimer



Cyril Wecht

spent three hours in the Archives last January and immediately released his conclusion that the autopsy items supported the Warren Commission's findings.

Wecht, then, was the first critic of the Commission to be allowed entrance, and this only after nearly a year of attempting to get permission from Burke Marshall, a law professor at Yale who is acting as a representative for the Kennedy family. Wecht said he probably wouldn't have gotten permission at all if Marshall hadn't been prodded by others interested in the findings.

When Wecht finally did make it to the Ar-

chives on August 23 and 24, he said he discovered a number of autopsy items were inexplicably missing—most notably the President's preserved brain and a number of microscopic slides of tissues removed from the bullet wounds. So far, no one has publicly said whether these items still exist. But what remained was enough for Wecht to confirm his doubts.

Wecht recreated the scene at Dealey Plaza and Parkland Hospital, both in Dallas, and at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, where the autopsy was performed the night of November 22.

In Dealey Plaza, the President's car "had just made a right turn and was proceeding to an underpass when shots rang out. President Kennedy clutched his throat, Governor John Connally (of Texas) was struck, then Kennedy was struck in the head." By the time the President was brought to Parkland Hospital nearly 30 minutes later he was already dead, the basics of "life" being preserved only by machine.

"Under Texas law the autopsy should have been performed in Dallas," said Wecht, "But there was much confusion, a lot of shouting and ordering going on, and eventually through ruse and other means the body was taken out a private door and put aboard Air Force 1 for the flight back to Washington."

"Now, the autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital should not have been any cause for confusion. Unfortunately, instead of the time lapse being used to get the most qualified pathologists for the autopsy, the situation got worse with the passage of time."

Wecht said three staff doctors were given the task, only one of whom had any experience

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with forensic pathology (the field of medicine dealing with criminal action). "It was essentially a military undertaking," he said. "Admirals, generals, FBI and Secret Service personnel were present in the room to oversee the autopsy. The doctors acted as military subordinates."

According to records made at Parkland Hospital, Wecht said, doctors there noted two wounds: one, a huge gaping hole, on the right side of the head; and the other a round hole in the middle front of his neck.

Doctors performing the autopsy in Washington, however, noted these wounds: the huge gaping hole in the head, a smaller hole in the upper back of his head, and a hole in his back approximately six inches below shoulder level.

This latter wound was puzzling because no exit wound was found for it, yet the bullet was not in the body. "They concluded," Wecht said, "that the bullet which had entered his back fell out of the same hole onto a stretcher when doctors at Parkland administered pressure to the President's chest to revive his heart." And, indeed, a bullet had been found on a stretcher by a janitor at Parkland the afternoon of the assassination.

The bullet wound in the throat was not even examined because doctors at Parkland, in their haste, had used the bullet hole to insert a breathing device into the President's throat. Thus, the Bethesda doctors noted only an "incision" in their report. "No one there had enough forensic experience to realize the incision was actually a bullet wound," said Wecht.

And so, Wecht said, the doctors at Bethesda released the body for burial and gave their results: the President had been struck once in the back (the bullet of which exited from the same hole), and once in the head (the bullet of which fragmented). Nothing was said about the smaller wound on the head; and, of course, nothing was said about the throat wound.

Wecht said the embarrassing part of the autopsy came the next day—after the body



was already gone—when the Bethesda doctors learned for the first time that there had also been a wound in the throat (a wound which, because of its smallness, the Parkland doctors had described as an "entrance wound"). Rather than admit their mistake and re-examine the body, Wecht said the doctors made a "despicable" choice "to be quiet about it."

The easiest way to get out was to simply match up the wound six inches below the shoulders in the back and the wound in his throat. "But you couldn't very well have a bullet enter six inches below the neck, make a sudden U-turn and exit out the throat. So they simply altered the sketches that had pin-

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pointed the wounds. I've seen the first sketches made of the wounds and they showed a wound six inches below the shoulders. I've also seen the holes in Kennedy's shirt and jacket and everything matches up. But in their testimony for the Warren Commission, the doctors simply moved the hole up several inches to make everything plausible. "Nobody challenged them. They said they hadn't drawn the first sketches to scale but now they could remember where the wound was. Every other hole, scar, incision, and mark was drawn in exactly. Only this hole was several inches off."

Wecht said that in December of 1966 he was allowed to view the Zapruder film of the assassination, which he said he did over one hundred times in addition to examining blow-ups of each frame. He said that using this film, the FBI was able to gauge the length of time between the first and last times the President was struck, which turned out to be approximately six seconds.

They also tested the weapon Oswald allegedly used (a bolt-action, single-shot Mannlicher-Carcano rifle) and found that the quickest anyone could load and fire it—never mind aim it—was 2.3 seconds. This fact presented another problem in that there were four known shots fired, the length of time between them found to be six seconds, and that it took the fastest marksman almost seven seconds just to get off that many wild shots.

The results indicated it was "an impossibility that one person could have done all the shooting," Wecht said it was this contradiction that led to the famous "single" or "magic" bullet theory; which affirmed that one bullet "entered John Kennedy's back and exited through his neck, went into Governor Connally's right back, broke a rib, exited from his right chest into his right wrist where it shattered a large bone, then went into his right thigh, only to be found later on the stretcher at Parkland Hospital."

"Whatever needed to be done to correct their inconsistencies was done," charged Wecht, "because no one else knew what was going on, and it was not until years later that private investigators had a chance to see the evidence."

Warren Commission exhibit 399 is the bullet found on the stretcher at Parkland. Wecht said his examination of the Archives x-rays showed particles of metal in Kennedy's chest and also in Connally's chest—traces of the bullet that passed through them. This same bullet was also supposed to have broken one of Connally's ribs and shattered a bone in his wrist. The bullet is a .35 mm. shell with an original weight of 161 grams. The bullet found on the stretcher at Parkland has a weight of 159 grams.

Wecht pointed out two more flaws with the

Commission findings:

(1) According to the Report, the bullet lost only two grams in passing through both Kennedy and Connally and leaving traces behind in both;

(2) and after doing all this damage to both men, the bullet has "no deformities in its upper two-thirds at all and the bottom one-third shows only very minimal flattening with no loss of substance."

In addition, one small section of the base was removed by the FBI for examination, which brings up the question of how the bullet could have lost any substance in passing through the two men and still weigh 159 grams after the sample was removed.

Still another impossibility with the Commission's findings, said Wecht, was that the bullet was moving from right to left as it passed through Kennedy, then had to abruptly turn in mid-air to go into Connally's right back (Connally was seated in the car directly in front of the President). "Bullets only do

that in comic books," said Wecht, "not in real life."

"There is not one forensic pathologist I've talked with who believes the Warren Commission findings," said Wecht. "And without the single-bullet theory, the Warren Commission conclusion of a lone assassin is destroyed. The evidence clearly indicates that at least more than one person was involved in the shooting."



The "Magic" Bullet

Wecht said he had no special information about who the other assassin(s) might be, but he implicated Dallas Patrolman J.D. Tippet—the policeman killed by Oswald minutes after the assassination—as part of the assassination conspiracy. According to Wecht, 45 minutes after the assassination, Tippet, "who was in a place he had no business being" (since all police had been ordered to Dealey Plaza) spotted Oswald walking down a street, "decided that he was the assassin," and went after him—only to be himself killed.

"J.D. Tippet was there to do a job that because of his failure, Jack Ruby had to complete two days later," charged Wecht.

"By legal definition we're dealing with a conspiracy," said Wecht. And who is behind it? Wecht points to members of the CIA.

He said that Lee Harvey Oswald had been on the payroll of the CIA prior to the assassination. "The CIA has pulled bloody, cut-throat operations all around the world," he said, "yet no one wants to believe that they do the same things here."

Wecht's conclusions, as limited as they are, parallel those of former New Orleans District Attorney James Garrison, with whom Wecht has worked on investigations relating to the Kennedy killing. Garrison has claimed that a group of right-wing CIA members along with members of the Cuban-exile community plotted and carried out the assassination of John Kennedy, in the belief that Kennedy was beginning a leftward swing that threatened national security. They also believed that Kennedy was planning a rapprochement with Fidel Castro.

Lee Harvey Oswald lived for 36 hours after the assassination. All that time, Wecht said, he was being interrogated by federal, state and local authorities. Yet, said Wecht, we are told that not one note, tape recording, or transcript was made in all those 36 hours of interrogation. Yet, the Dallas police force was then reputed to be one of the most experienced in the country when it came to homicide cases.

"But who listens to all of this?" Wecht asked. The Warren Commission findings have remained the official version of the assassination for almost ten years, and few seem disposed to challenge those findings. Not surprisingly, the Pittsburgh Press, Wecht's hometown paper, refused to print more than a brief account of his visit to the Archives—an account which mentioned only in passing that Wecht disputed the Commission's findings.

—el rubio/PW